

Final agreement to study contamination at Columbia Falls aluminum plant site (Flathead County, Mont.)

Plant owner commits to aggressive site investigation to inform future cleanup actions

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(Denver, Colo. - November __, 2015) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced a final agreement to investigate contamination at the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant Superfund site, in Flathead County, Montana. Under the terms of the agreement, the site's current owner, Columbia Falls Aluminum Company, will conduct a comprehensive investigation of soils, river sediments, and ground and surface water to determine the nature and extent of contamination at the site, also known as the Anaconda Company Columbia Falls Reduction Plant. The company will reimburse EPA for its future costs in overseeing the investigation.

"This agreement helps us to fully identify the nature and extent of the contamination and begin to address threats to human health and the environment at the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant Superfund site," said Shaun McGrath, EPA's regional administrator in Denver. "We are encouraged that the company has committed to an aggressive investigation of the contamination in a legally binding agreement."

The site, located two miles northeast of Columbia Falls, covers approximately 960 acres north of the Flathead River, a fishery that includes the federally designated threatened bull trout and the federally sensitive westslope cutthroat trout. EPA's initial evaluation indicates that ground water and surface water at the site contain various contaminants of concern, including cyanide, fluoride, various metals and pesticides.

EPA worked closely with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to negotiate the scope and details of the investigation.

The results of the investigation will determine cleanup needs and identify potential cleanup options at the site. EPA will attend a public meeting in Columbia Falls on [Day of Week], January __, 2016, at ____ p.m. at the Columbia Falls Library to discuss the agreement, address questions, and outline next steps including opportunities for public involvement.

The plant operated between 1955 and 2009, and produced aluminum. Spent potliner material, a federally listed hazardous waste, was generated as a byproduct. Spent potliner material is known to contain cyanide compounds that can leach into groundwater.

In 1985, Columbia Falls Aluminum Company bought the plant from Atlantic Richfield Company, which had purchased the plant's original owner, Anaconda Company, in 1977.

For more information, visit: <http://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csinfo.cfm?id=0802850>.